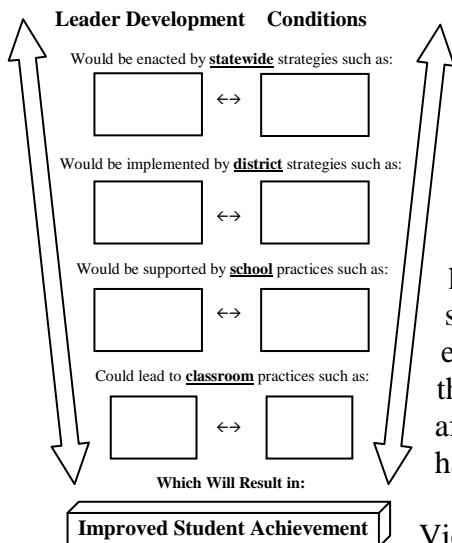


# The Wallace Foundation's Strategic Through-Line:

## Connecting Leadership to Learning

To help education leaders assess whether or not their strategies to address major issues are likely to change the larger system of public education and connect the policies, practices and actions in ways that promote significant improvements in the classroom, The Wallace Foundation has developed a tool—the *strategic through-line*. The tool focuses on three kinds of connections: between training of leaders and their conditions; between different levels in the system—state, district, school and classroom; and between current efforts and necessary new strategies.

### The Wallace Foundation Strategic Through-Line Concept



The “strategic through-line” graphically lays out a box for “leader development” (training) and “conditions” (systems) at each level of the education system: state, municipal/ district, school, and classroom. A team of state and district leaders could use this template to think through what strategies would most effectively begin to address a major hurdle to leaders’ ability to improve the quality of student learning. As the team filled in the strategies at each level, focusing on both training and conditions, they would be able to plot out how the approach affected each level of the system and whether or not it had the potential to impact student achievement widely.

Viewed horizontally, the through-line shows the relationship between leader development and conditions within each level. Viewed vertically, it shows the alignment, or lack thereof, from one level to the others.

Viewed horizontally, this tool raises questions such as:

- What training (leader development) is necessary at each level to ensure that leaders will have the knowledge and skills to lead effectively in the environments in which they work?
- What conditions (larger system issues) need to be addressed in order for leaders to use the knowledge gained to lead change?
- How do leader development and conditions change strategies mutually reinforce each other so that the behaviors of leaders have the desired effect on student achievement?

Viewed vertically, this tool raises questions such as:

- What is each level of the system best able to do to support the changes in leadership, teaching and learning?
- How do the strategies reinforce each other across the various levels of the education system?
- How are state policies being changing practice in districts, schools and classrooms
- How are effective practices at the district and school level leveraged to create broader statewide impact?

In addition, within each box of the through-line, proposed strategies can be viewed in context of current, related strategies, thus enabling leaders to ask: Do the proposed strategies support, build upon and fill gaps in existing policies and practices at each level—or do they just create another layer of unaligned policy and disconnected practices?

The strategic through-line is helpful for states and districts to map out well-coordinated responses to seemingly intractable problems facing leaders. It requires that states and districts take both the preparation leaders and their conditions into account. And by mapping out how policies and practices at each level of the education system can more effectively connect, leaders begin to see and appreciate what each level of the system can do best. When these efforts are done in coordination, we can strengthen the connection between leaders' actions and significant improvements in student achievement on a broad scale.

# Leadership to Learning Strategic Through-Line

Breakthrough Idea Example: Changing practice to improve student learning based on student assessment results

Would be implemented by statewide strategies such as:

**Leader Development**

*-Universities incorporating student standards and use of data in preparation programs*

**Conditions**

-Align state assessment to student standards  
-Provide timely and usable student achievement data for superintendents, principals and teachers



Would be reinforced by district/municipal strategies such as:

**Leader Development**

-Training in assessment development and use of data

**Conditions**

*-Eliminate parts of district testing programs that unnecessarily repeat state assessment*  
*-Support use of in-class diagnostic testing*



Would be supported by school practices such as:

**Leader Development**

-Professional development incorporating student learning standards and use of data

**Conditions**

-Better align resources (money, people and time) with students' needs



Could lead to classroom practices such as:

Use data to differentiate instruction for students to meet rigorous standards

Which Will Result in:

**Improved Student Achievement**

**Key:**

*Italics:* Proposed activities  
Non-italics: Activities already underway

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR  
CCSSO'S 2004 ANNUAL POLICY FORUM BREAKOUT SESSION

*"LEADERSHIP AND ALIGNED SYSTEMS"*

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 20, 2004, 10:15-11:45

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

**A. Framing the Issues**

**1. Defining SEA Capacity Building**

- i. Organizational Design;
- ii. Organizational Development; and
- iii. Organizational Leadership.

**2. Framing the Issue**

The *Leadership and Aligned Systems* breakout discussion will focus squarely on these questions. In particular, as states are shifting from a focus primarily on compliance and monitoring to more of a focus on technical assistance and support, this breakout discussion group will think about how the shift plays itself out along the lines of organizational design, organizational development, and organizational leadership.

**B. Facilitated Discussion of SEA Capacity Building**

**1. Hedgehog:** If you had to choose today, what would be your hedgehog concept?

- i. Three Circles:
  - a. What are you (or do you want to be/can you be) best at in the world?
  - b. Are you passionate about it? Can you instill passion within your SEA for the work?
  - c. Can you make a compelling case for public investment in it?

- ii. How does the hedgehog concept support your ability to improve student performance in your state?
- iii. Does thinking about the hedgehog concept help you to think about your current strategic plan, structures, processes, and capacities?
- iv. What are the mission, vision, core values of your SEA? What are your SEA's strategic goals? Do these statements of direction provide enough focus to be considered a hedgehog?

**2. Organizational Design:** What kinds of functions will your SEA staff need to perform in order to effectively fulfill your core functions and deliver on your hedgehog concept? What is your capacity to deliver these functions?

- i. What are the core functions of your SEA? Are these the right functions given today's context? Do they fit with your hedgehog concept? How does what LEAs and schools are doing (or need to be doing) help you to think about what your SEA must do?
- ii. If your core functions are not clear, what do you need to do to bring clarity?
- iii. What are your delivery mechanisms for your core functions and your hedgehog concept?
- iv. What are alternate ways of getting the work done? What capacities would you need in those scenarios?
- v. What conditions do you need to change in order to deliver on these core functions to your customers? What structures and processes do you have in your SEA to harness the collective capacity of your staff to deliver these functions?
- vi. What needs to be done in your SEA to align the mission, vision, goals, and how you are functionally organized (organizational chart) to better serve your internal and external customers? What disconnects or barriers exist that need to be addressed for you to achieve your goals?
- vii. How is your work modeling what LEAs and schools need to be doing to impact student achievement?

- 3. Organizational Development:** How are you developing your staff (individually and collectively) around your core functions?
- i. Do you have staff currently able and available to fulfill your core functions? How much staff development and how much recruitment will you need to do in order to fulfill your core functions?
  - ii. In what ways can you help your staff develop the individual knowledge and skills they need to deliver the core functions?
  - iii. In what ways can you develop the collective capacity of your staff to deliver?
  - iv. What human resources questions must you address to assure you are recruiting, retaining, training, and utilizing staff to the best of their abilities?
- 4. Organizational Leadership:** Is your state education agency defining education policy and practice agenda in your state?
- i. Assuming you cannot do it all, are you able to define and communicate your vision and engage multiple players in filling the gaps in your capacity?
  - ii. Might having a hedgehog concept help you to focus your energies and target your advocacy, organizing, efforts at cajoling partners to support your work?
  - iii. What are your personal needs in terms of leadership development as you help your SEA through this work?
- 5. Organizational Needs:** What supports, information, and capacity do you need? What challenges do you face?

Background information from The Wallace Foundation will be handed out in the *Leadership and Aligned Systems* and is attached.